



A Reckoning of Trust

* *Exploring Test-Optional Admissions Approaches at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities*

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Strategic Communications MA

Why the U of M ?



Test-Optional Admissions



What Does it Mean?

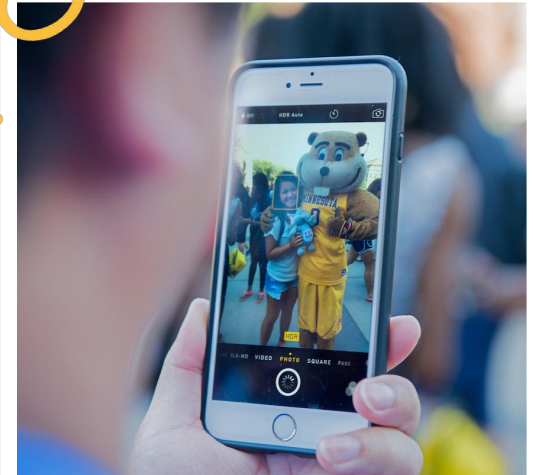
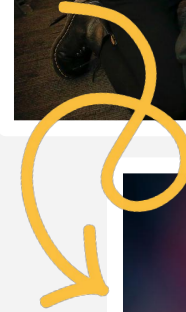
Test-Optional is an institutional policy that doesn't require standardized exams for admission

What is its Purpose?

To remove barriers in the application process

What are the Future Implications?

A more **fair and equitable admissions process** that emphasizes holistic value





Problem Definition

Key stakeholders don't trust that test-optional admissions will work to their benefit.

Will my application still be competitive? Will I qualify for scholarships?

Prospective Students

What are the future repercussions? Will test-optional students still be successful?

University Leadership

Target Audiences

Primary Decision Makers



Influencers



Information Providers

Student Persona - **Anxious Achiever**



Demographics: Rising junior in St. Paul, identifies as female, first-generation college student

Academic Talents and Aspirations:

- High achiever
- Active community member
- Wants to apply to medical school one day
- Interested in competitive 4-year colleges

Top Anxieties:



But a test score can only help, right?

I may be a standout student at my school, but now the pool is so much bigger!

If I am accepted into these top colleges, how will I pay for it?





Research Insights

based on qualitative primary interviews and secondary research

Consumer Insight

Students facing an uncertain future require consistency and reassurance before making big decisions

Cultural Insight

Equity and diversity efforts must be a genuine investment, not a checkbox

Market Insight

To benefit as an early adopter, the U of M will need to stand out amongst its competition

Brand Insight

The U of M has an opportunity to act on its mission and values and reposition success

✳ Goal of Communication

Dispel test-optional misconceptions through strategies that build brand familiarity and trust.

✳ Communication Opportunity

Provide transparency to the application process through early outreach and simplified, value-driven messaging.

Changing the Test-Optional Narrative

We believe that...



Value is Not Defined by a Test Score

For college-bound students, the University of Minnesota Office of Admissions is a supportive community of mentors that sees you as an individual, not as a test score

Communications Objectives

GUIDE

Generate brand awareness that ties the test-optional approach to brand values

EMBOLDEN

Build stakeholder confidence and trust

LEAD

Position the U of M as a leader in the equitable admissions space

GUIDE



Driver - Awareness



Key Message:

Student success looks different for everyone-
we are committed to finding out what it looks like for you

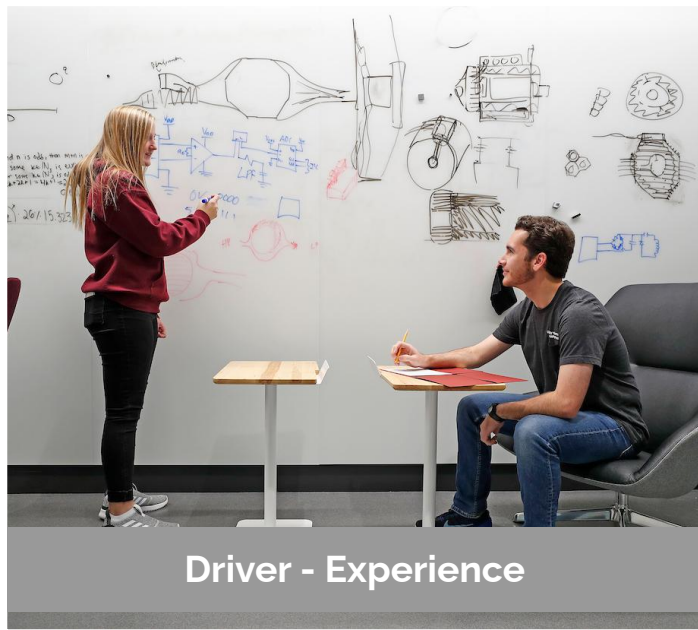
Key Metric: Inquirer Increase

PESO Media: Paid, Earned, Owned

Key Channels:



EMBOLDEN



Driver - Experience



Key Message:
What you see is what you get

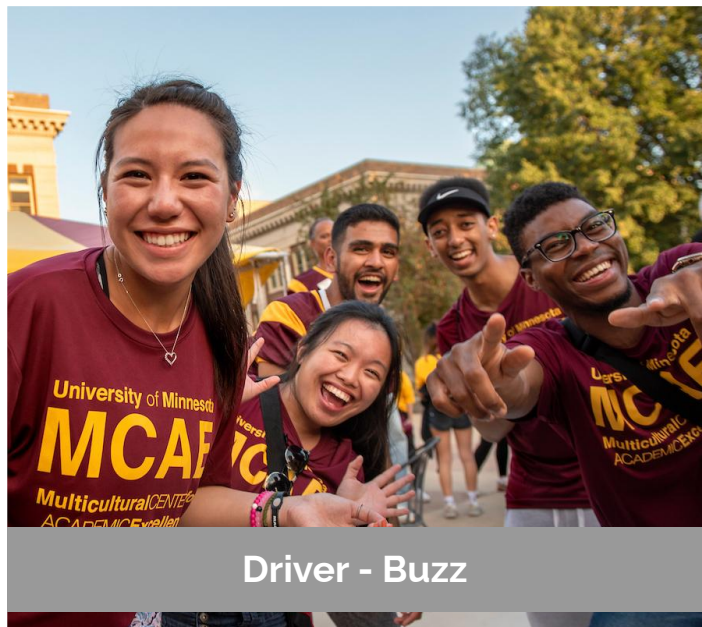
Key Metric: Points of Connection

PESO Media: Paid, Shared, Owned

Key Channels:



LEAD



Driver - Buzz



Key Message:

We have the power to create a more equitable future

Key Metric: Share of Experience

PESO Media: Owned, Earned, Shared

Key Channels:



Implementation Requirements

Balance budget and time investments

Total Spend - \$14,000

Paid Social Media Campaigns -
\$10,000

Website Enhancements -
\$3,000

Video Creation and Personalized Content -
\$1,000

Key Partnerships

- University President's Office
- Video and Media Specialists
- University Relations
- Media Relations
- Student and Staff Ambassadors

Implementation Timeline

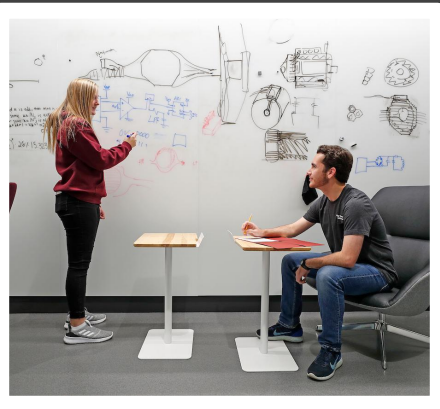
SUMMER	FALL	SPRING
<p>Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal Alignment• External Social Media Efforts <p>Key Audiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prospective Students• U of M Leadership	<p>Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expand Owned Media• Influencer Engagement <p>Key Audiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inquiring Students and Families	<p>Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Media Relations• Internal Promotion <p>Key Audiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty and Staff• MN Residents

* Evaluating the Next Year



GUIDE

Increase in
prospective student inquiries



EMBOLDEN

Increase in
prospective student engagement



LEAD

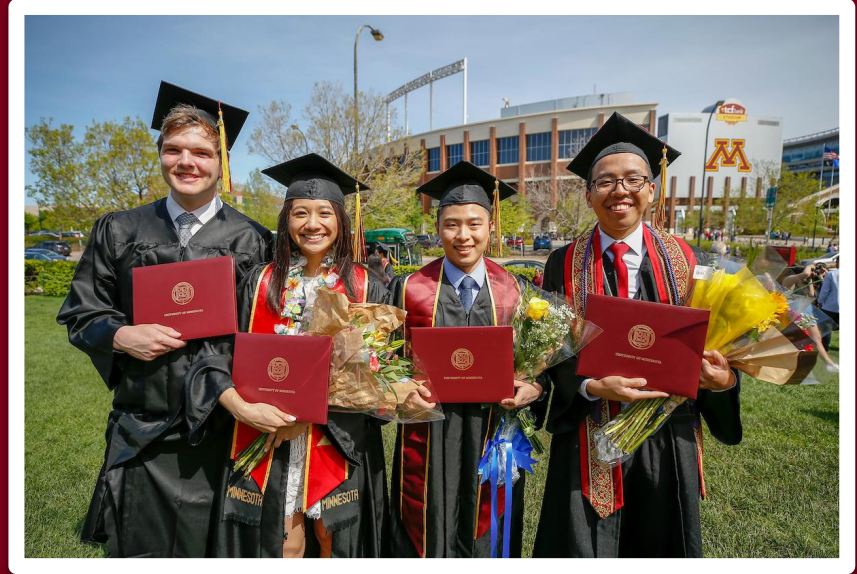
Increase in
share of experience

* Evaluating the Next Four Years

Tracking future success

- Surveying test-optional admits
- Monitoring diversity in freshman class composition

Communication Goal: Positive brand awareness, experience, and perception





Dispelling Test-Optional Misconceptions is Possible



It Requires...

- Transparent, authentic messaging
- External promotion and internal alignment
 - Leadership and partner support